

**CLAIMS:**

What is claimed is:

1. A method for processing a low-overhead interrupt, comprising:
  - detecting the occurrence of an interrupt condition that requires servicing;
  - 5 determining that the interrupt condition corresponds to a fast interrupt;
  - loading a first instruction of an interrupt service routine (ISR) into an instruction register for immediate execution;
  - loading an address of a second instruction within the ISR into a program counter; and
  - fetching the second ISR instruction while executing the first ISR instruction.
- 10 2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
  - storing contents of a prefetch register into a holding register based on the determining.
- 15 3. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
  - storing a program counter value and a status register value onto a stack based on the determining.
- 20 4. The method according to claim 3, further comprising:
  - executing remaining instructions in the ISR; and
  - returning from the ISR.
5. The method according to claim 4, wherein the returning comprises:
  - restoring an instruction from the holding register into the prefetch register.

6. The method according to claim 5, wherein the returning further comprises popping a program counter value and a status register value from a stack and storing them into respective program counter and status registers.

5

7. The method according to claim 6, further comprising executing the instruction restored to the prefetch register and fetching the next instruction for execution based on the status register and the program counter register.

10  
15  
20

8. The method according to claim 7, wherein the status register after the returning from the ISR indicates that a repeat instruction is being processed and wherein a loop counter is decremented after executing the instruction restored to the prefetch register.

9. A processor for handling low-overhead interrupts, comprising:

15  
16. a first interrupt instruction register storing the first interrupt instruction of a plurality of interrupt service routines;

17. a holding register;

18. an interrupt vector register;

19. a program counter; and

20. interrupt logic coupled to the registers, upon an interrupt, the interrupt logic a) loading a first instruction of an interrupt service routine (ISR) from the first interrupt instruction register into an instruction register for immediate execution and b) loading an address of a second

instruction within the ISR into the program counter based on the interrupt vector register and executing the ISR.

10. The processor according to claim 9, wherein the interrupt logic further c) stores the next  
5 instruction for regular execution upon return from the interrupt into a holding register.

11. The processor according to claim 9, wherein the interrupt logic further stores a program  
counter value and a status register value onto a stack based on the determining.

10. The processor according to claim 11, wherein the interrupt logic causes a return from the ISR  
at the end of the ISR.

11. The processor according to claim 12, wherein upon the return, the interrupt logic restores an  
instruction from the holding register into a register for execution.

12. The processor according to claim 13, wherein upon the return the interrupt logic further pops  
a program counter value and a status register value from a stack and stores them respectively  
into the program counter and a status registers.

20 15. The processor according to claim 14, wherein the status register after the returning from the  
ISR indicates that a repeat instruction is being processed and wherein a loop counter is  
decremented after executing the instruction restored to the register.